

spirituality is her conception of the contemplative as a lowly, serviceable instrument of intercession and expiation for the sins of the living and the dead. 'Our Lord said: "If one cannot capture wild animals any other way, one drives them into the water. If a sinner cannot be converted any other way, he is driven by the prayers of good people into the tears of their hearts".' In Book VI, in the section entitled 'When thou art about to die, take leave of ten things', with moving simplicity she writes 'I take leave of all those in Hell and thank God that He exercises His rightcousness on them. Were I to be longer here I would wish them well.' Often we are reminded of Julian of Norwich's 'All shall be well':

I say to thee by My Divine fidelity  
That there are more in Holy Church  
Who go straight to Heaven  
Then go down to Hell.

We shall not find in Mechtild's writings the sensuous gloatings over the torments of the damned which disfigure so many medieval spiritual autobiographies. Often harried and persecuted in her lifetime, she seems to preserve always a candid charity and self-denial: she can write almost affectionately of one of her detractors as 'My Pharisee'; and she says of Compassion, 'She is very perfect; she has taken my rightcousness from me'.

To all those who love the Middle Ages and the mystics, the *Revelations*, or, to give them their better alternative title, *The Flowing Light of the Godhead*, will come as an enrichment; and this translation is marked by a modesty and sincerity which serves Mechtild well.

ERIC COLLEDGE

TRAGEDY AND THE PARADOX OF THE FORTUNATE FALL. By Herbert Weisinger. (Routledge and Kegan Paul; 21s.).

This is an attempt to solve the problem posed by the contradictory experience of tragedy, in which we receive pleasure from the contemplation of pain and suffering. The nature of this tragic pleasure has attracted the investigator from Aristotle onwards, and most of the theories propounded have been glosses on the *Poetics* rather than original guesses. Mr Weisinger's approach to the inquiry is a curiously roundabout one: he proceeds by a detailed survey of the theme of the dying god and his rebirth in the myth and ritual of the ancient Near East. It is easy in this part of the book to see how much the author's imagination has been seized by the confident, synthesising sweep of Frazer, even to the extent of setting out from a particular point of ritual, the lighting of the Paschal candle on Easter Saturday, and finally leading the inquiry back to this same point. But, in what must inevitably be a largely second-hand presentation of material relating to Egyptian, Sumerian, Canaanite and Hebrew beliefs, he has availed himself of a wealth of more recent research; the

result is a considerable toning down of the syncretist impression.

Indeed, the author is anxious to avoid any too facile evolutionary interpretation because of a humanist distrust of any view of mental development which would look for explanations outside man himself. 'The motivating force remains, after all, man' (p. 13); 'It (the gradual development of the myth) is a process which begins with man and continues with him' (p. 193). Yet Mr Weisinger's attitude to the myths of rebirth is not simply pragmatist; elsewhere he speaks of a rational world order in which human suffering finds its place. One is driven to the conclusion that his point of view remains imperfectly defined, oscillating between a modish existentialism (man makes his own choices: even if they are wrong he must make them) and an urge to contribute to the contemporary industry of tracing culture patterns.

It is not till the sixth and final chapter that we reach the discussion of tragedy proper. It is maintained that while an age of faith believes too surely in its myths to invest man with the freedom of choice implicit in tragedy, an atmosphere of scepticism is inimical to tragedy in a different fashion by converting everything to 'the objective formality of art'. Only in a state of mind between the two, when religious faith is becoming conscious of the pressure of new ideas, can the fundamental questions of tragedy be asked. The essential tragic note is 'the small moment of doubt or indecision', found in the ritual pattern too, before the god or the hero makes his choice. This is the fascinating core of Mr Weisinger's argument; we may regret that his historical approach, which sees scepticism as a particular climate of opinion, ignores the type of scepticism which anyone at any time may apply to the data of his experience, and which may be the prelude to faith.

Because of its devious argument, and abortive attempt to bridge the gap between the historical and the critical, this is not a successful book; however, a failure so gallant and at such a level of difficulty, has rewards to offer the reader.

ROGER SHARROCK

THE INTERPRETATION OF THE FOURTH GOSPEL. By C. H. Dodd.  
(Cambridge University Press; 42s.)

This book, the result of much study and thought, is one more sign of the lasting fascination which the Fourth Gospel has for those Christians who have decided that it is not the Apostle's work, and that its contents are largely fiction. Dr Dodd here endeavours to prove that the chief purpose of the author (whoever he was) was to recommend the truth of the Incarnation to the same sort of Hellenistic-Jewish circles for whom Philo had written his books—circles in which more or less knowledge of Judaism was combined with a mixed Stoic-Platonic philosophy. In this